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(54) PROCESS AND DEVICE FOR OBTAINING OXIDISED GRAPHITE

(57) The invention pertains to the technology of carbon-graphite materials, in particular to the production of oxidised graphite used as a component of fireproofing materials, and also to the production of expanded graphite with a high degree of expansion, used in metallurgy, thermal power engineering, chemical industry and other industries.

The process of obtaining the oxidised graphite comprises the treatment of powder graphite in an electrolytic solution of strong acids to produce the GIC, hydrolysis, washing and drying the oxidised graphite. The treatment is conducted in the presence of chemical oxidants at a constant redox potential 0.55-1.55 V or/and treatment is conducted by anodic oxidation of graphite while passing the electric current through the mixture of graphite and acid placed between anode and cathode at a constant anode potential 1-2 V and in a weight acid-to-graphite ratio of 1-4. As a strong acid sulphuric or nitric acids are used mainly.

The device for obtaining oxidised graphite comprises reactor with housing having inner cylindrical surface. Anode, cathode and the permeable for acid

solution diaphragm located between cathode and anode are inserted in the housing. Also inserted in the housing are vanes, which are radially fixed on the axial horizontal shaft and have an opportunity of rotation and radial moving against the stop to a surface of the anode. Half-ring-shaped situated in the lower part of the housing between pipes for loading and unloading. The anode is a half-ring whose axis is shifted against horizontal shaft axis with the gap between anode and diaphragm increasing 1.5-3 times from loading to unloading pipe.

Description

Field of the Invention.

5 This invention pertains to the technology of carbon-graphite materials, in particular to the production of oxidised graphite used as a component of fireproofing materials, and also to the production of expanded graphite with a high degree of expansion, used in metallurgy, thermal power engineering, chemical, atomic and other fields of industry.

Prior Art.

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Known in the art is the process of production of oxidised graphite by hydrolysis of graphite intercalation compounds (GIC) with strong inorganic acids, mainly such as H_2SO_4 or HNO_3 . The essence of this process is the treatment of graphite with saturated acid in the presence of chemical oxidants (KMnO_4 , CrO_3 , KClO_4 , H_2O_2 , HNO_3 , N_2O_5 etc.) or electrochemically. Depending on the conditions of chemical or electrochemical oxidation of graphite a series of GIC are formed differing in composition and structure. These compounds are called stages and the number of stage is determined by the quantity of carbon layers between two nearest layers of intercalation compound. In the low I stage all the interlayer space is filled with anions inserted into the graphite lattice., in the II and III stages the filling proceeds in one or two unfilled layers, correspondingly. One of the main features of the stage is the identity period l_c — periodically repeated fragment of structure determined by an X-ray analysis. The number of the stage of the GIC is regulated by a quantity of electricity passed through the electrolytic solution of acid while graphite treatment, and also by the potential value at which the treatment proceeds. Besides, while sulphuric acid treatment the number of stage is regulated also by the quantity of oxidant used in the synthesis of compound. While fuming nitric acid treatment of graphite the synthesis of the stages II and III does not require the presence of the chemical oxidants and the number of stage is regulated by the oxidation conditions. For the obtaining the I stage GIC the addition of N_2O_5 to fuming nitric acid is needed (W.Rüdorf and U.Hofmann, Z. Anorg. Allg. Chem., B238, (1938), N1, S.1-50; A.Metrot and H.Fuzellier, Carbon, v.22, (1984), N2, p. 131-133, V.V.Avdeev et al., Carbon, v.30, (1992), N6, p.819-823).

If the GIC is washed with water and the product of hydrolysis, called oxidised graphite, is subjected to a swift heating the expanded graphite is formed. Expanded graphite is the extremely light chemically inert carbon material with highly developed specific surface and with good heatproof, fireproof and adsorption properties. The expanded graphite is easily pressed into a flexible graphite foil. The products on its base find wide application as shield coverings, packings, thickeners (French Patent N1395964, 1965; US Patent N4102960, 1978).

It is known in the production of the oxidised graphite to treat the graphite with sulphuric acid solution with the addition of 2-5 parts by weight of hydrogen peroxide to 100 parts by weight of H_2SO_4 . For its the successful implementation the 80-90% H_2O_2 is needed (US Patent N4091083, 1978). The mentioned process is ecologically pure but the use of highly saturated hydrogen peroxide solutions reduces the reproducibility of the process.

For the production of oxidised graphite a process is known comprising the treatment while mixing of powder graphite with ammonia persulfate solution in 98.5-100% sulphuric acid with redox potential of oxidising solution equal to 1.3-1.8 V, the consumption of oxidant is 0.4 g per 1g of graphite. The I stage intercalation compound of sulphuric acid in graphite (graphite hydrogensulphate) is formed. It is then separated from oxidising solution, is subjected to hydrolysis and washing. From the obtained oxidised graphite the expanded graphite is formed at 1000°C having the density of 0.0012g/cm³ (Russian Patent N1738755, 1993).

The disadvantage of the process is the higher consumption of costly oxidant and the necessity to use the sulphuric acid monohydrate with concentration of 98.5-100%.

A process of production of oxidised graphite is known consisting in the treatment of powder graphite with the mixture of 96% H_2SO_4 and 95% HNO_3 in the ratio of HNO_3 : H_2SO_4 =0.07, followed by washing to pH=7 and drying. The expanded graphite with density of 0.005 g/cm³ can then be obtained from oxidised graphite at 400-1000°C in the presence of gaseous ammoniac (USSR Author Certificate N1813711, 1993).

The disadvantage of the process is the large consumption of water needed for the washing of oxidised graphite to pH=7 and also the use of gaseous ammoniac requiring the complicated devices and special safety measures which rise the cost of the process.

An electrochemical process of producing the graphite hydrogensulphate and then oxidised graphite is known comprising the insertion of powder graphite and sulphuric acid solution into the electrochemical chamber, pressing the graphite to anode, electrochemical treatment of pressed graphite in the sulphuric acid solution between cathode and anode in isolated region followed by unloading of graphite hydrogensulphate. The consumption of sulphuric acid is not controlled in the process. The current density is 40-50 mA/cm², the voltage increases in the course of treatment from 2.3 to 4.4 V. The obtained by following treatment expanded graphite has the density of 0.004 g/cm³. The device for performing this process comprises the cylindrical housing with pipes for loading the reagents and unloading the graphite hydrogensulphate, anode and cathode inserted in the housing and sulphuric acid permeable diaphragm for pressing

graphite to anode (US Patent N4350576, 1982).

A process is a cyclic one and is low productive because of a large duration of the process: the treatment takes 7 hours. The disadvantage of the process is also the processing of electrochemical oxidation of graphite at a constant current density, which does not allow obtaining the uniform product while using large quantities of graphite.

5 Known in the production of the oxidised graphite is a process comprising the treatment of graphite with 60-90% HNO_3 taken in 3-5 fold excess in the presence of 4-20 fold excess of KMnO_4 , following washing the formed intercalation compound of nitric acid in graphite with water (graphite nitrate), wetting with antifretting agents and drying at temperature not lower than 1000°C . As a result of heat treatment of oxidised graphite the expanded graphite is formed with the density of 0.012 g/cm^3 (US Patent N4244934, 1981).

10 The disadvantage of the process is the use of expensive oxidant that makes the process uneconomical. Besides that the oxidised graphite has a low degree of expansion.

Summary of the Invention.

15 The proposed process allows obtaining with high specific effectivity the oxidised graphite of uniform composition with high degree of expansion. For the implementation of the process in preferable variants the design of the device as also proposed.

The process of obtaining the oxidised graphite comprises the treatment of powder graphite in an electrolytic solution of strong acids to produce the GIC, hydrolysis, washing and drying the oxidised graphite, the treatment is conducted in the presence of chemical oxidants at a constant redox potential $0.55\text{--}1.55\text{ V}$ and/or treatment is conducted by anodic oxidation of graphite while passing the electric current through the mixture of graphite and acid placed between anode and cathode at a constant anode potential $1\text{--}2\text{ V}$ and in a weight acid-to-graphite ratio of $1\text{--}4$. As a strong acid sulphuric or nitric acids are used mainly. In the sulphuric acid solution the treatment can be carried out at a constant redox potential $0.65\text{--}0.75\text{ V}$ with submission of gaseous chlorine in it, or at a constant redox potential $0.55\text{--}0.65\text{ V}$ with submission of sulphur (VI) oxide in it, or at a constant redox potential $0.94\text{--}1.09\text{ V}$ with submission of fuming nitric acid in it at weight ratio of nitric to sulphuric acid equal to $1\text{--}2$ recalculated for waterless acids, or at a constant redox potential $1.45\text{--}1.55\text{ V}$ with submission of ammonium nitrate in it with consumption $0.046\text{--}0.137\text{ g}$ per 1 g of starting graphite. In the last housing while separation of GIC the excess of oxidising solution is removed preferably to the concentration of less than 1.5 g per 1 g of graphite. The treatment in the fuming nitric acid is carried out at a constant redox potential $0.92\text{--}0.97\text{ V}$ and the drying of oxidised graphite is conducted at temperature not higher than 80°C .

30 Electrochemical anodic oxidation of graphite in the saturated solution of sulphuric acid is conducted at anode potential of $1.6\text{--}2.0\text{ V}$, $1.3\text{--}1.5\text{ V}$ and $1.0\text{--}1.2\text{ V}$ for the formation of the I, II and III stages GIC correspondingly. It is possible for the formation of the I stage GIC to conduct the treatment of graphite consecutively in the sulphuric acid solution with redox potential $0.65\text{--}0.75\text{ V}$ with submission of gaseous chlorine in it, or in the sulphuric acid solution with redox potential $0.55\text{--}0.65\text{ V}$ with submission of sulphur (VI) oxide in it and with consecutive anodic oxidation of reaction mixture at a constant anode potential $1.6\text{--}2.0\text{ V}$. For the formation of II and III stages GIC the anodic oxidation of graphite can be carried out in the saturated nitric acid solution at anode potential $1.3\text{--}1.4\text{ V}$ and $1.15\text{--}1.2\text{ V}$ correspondingly.

The specified potential ranges provide obtaining the uniform oxidised graphite with controllable degree of expansion. Reduction of the potential below the specified values leads to obtaining only highest stages of GIC with low degree of expansion. Increase of potential is also inexpedient since it leads to the overoxidation of graphite and reduces its degree of expansion.

According to the invention the graphite treatment can be carried out consecutively: at the first stage using chlorine or sulphur (VI) oxide, and then using electrochemical oxidation of II stage GIC obtained with chemical oxidants to I stage GIC with high degree of expansion.

45 It has been experimentally stated that the degree of expansion of oxidised graphite depends on the number of stage of GIC: the lower the stage number the higher the quality of expanded graphite can be obtained. Therefore the oxidation of graphite should be conducted in strictly controlled conditions allowing obtaining predetermined stage of GIC. One of the main factors controlling the synthesis of the given GIC stage is the potential value at which the graphite treatment is carried out. Chemical and electrochemical oxidation of graphite have the uniform mechanism, hence one can assume the equivalence between the redox potential of chemical oxidant solution in saturated acids and the anode potential of electrochemical oxidation of graphite. Equilibrium values of anode potential needed for the synthesis of I-III stages of GIC are $0.46\text{--}0.55\text{ V}$ for III stage, $0.55\text{--}0.83\text{ V}$ for II stage and higher than 0.83 V for I stage of GIC (graphite hydrogensulphate). Redox potentials of oxidant in the sulphuric acid solution depend on the nature of both oxidant and saturated acid. It has been experimentally stated that if the redox potential value of the oxidant in the saturated sulphuric acid solution coincides with that of electrochemical potential of formation of I stage GIC then in the course of chemical synthesis the I stage of graphite hydrogensulphate will be obtained. For example, if the potential of chlorine dissolved in the in the saturated sulphuric acid has the value of $0.65\text{--}0.75\text{ V}$ thus corresponding to the formation range of II stage GIC, then the use of this oxidant will lead to the formation of the II stage graphite hydrogensulphate. Similarly,

with the concentration of sulphur oxide in sulphuric acid 5-15 % by weight the potential changes in the range of 0.55-0.65 V what means the possibility of formation of only II stage. To obtain the I stage is possible only by combination of chemical and electrochemical methods, oxidising the II stage electrochemically.

The actual potential values at which the electrochemical treatment of graphite is conducted are slightly higher than the equilibrium values. This is due to the fact that the conduction of the graphite anodic oxidation process in the equilibrium conditions requires longer time and for increase of speed of the process the double increase of working potential is necessary.

The device for use in obtaining the oxidised graphite comprises reactor with housing having inner cylindrical surface. The reactor is equipped with pipes for loading reagents and unloading the formed products. Anode, cathode and the permeable for sulphuric acid diaphragm for pressing graphite to anode located between cathode and anode are inserted in the housing. Also inserted in the housing are vanes, which are radially fixed on the axial horizontal shaft and have an opportunity of rotation and radial moving against the stop to a surface of the anode. Diaphragm is made in the form of a ring with cuts for vanes forming isolated zones for electrochemical treatment. Cathode is made in the form of a wheel with cuts for vanes fixed on the axial shaft. Half-ring-shaped anode is situated in the lower part of the housing between pipes for loading and unloading. The axis of anode half-ring is shifted against horizontal shaft axis to the unloading pipe increasing the gap between anode and diaphragm in 1.5-3 times from loading to unloading pipe.

Besides, the device can be equipped by a mixer with pipes for loading reagents and an injector for loading gaseous oxidants and a pipe for removing exhaust gases and pipes for draining off formed products, one of which is connected with the loading pipe through the feeder. Since it is not convenient to conduct the hydrolysis of GIC right in the reactor the device can also be equipped with vessels for hydrolysis of GIC and for washing the oxidised graphite and with means of filtration and drying. Hydrolysis and washing can be staged in the same vessel but it is preferable to conduct each operation in a separate vessel.

Brief Description of the Drawings.

Referring to Fig. 1, a cross section of the reactor included in the framework of device for use in production of oxidised graphite is shown.

Referring to Fig.2, device for use in production of oxidised graphite including a mixer and a feeder for chemical treatment of graphite is shown.

Reactor comprises a housing (1) with cylindrical inner surface with pipes (2) and (3) for loading stating reagents and unloading obtained products, correspondingly. Between the pipes (2) and (3) in the lower part of housing (1) anode (4) is situated made in the form of a half-ring. On the horizontal rotating shaft (5) in the housing (1) are fixed radial vanes (6) with an opportunity of rotation and radial moving against the stop to a surface of the anode (4). Cathode (7) is made in the form of a wheel with cuts for radial vanes (6). Situated between anode half-ring (4) and cathode (7) a ring diaphragm (8), permeable for sulphuric acid solution, serves for pressing graphite to a half-ring-shaped anode (4). Diaphragm (8) has cuts for radial vanes (6). Isolated zones (9) for electrochemical treatment are formed between anode (4) surface, ring diaphragm (8) and two neighbouring vanes (6). Mercury-sulphate comparison electrode (10) for measuring anode potential during electrochemical treatment of graphite is located in the lower part of housing (1).

Since anode half-ring (4) is shifted against the shaft (5) axis, the gap between diaphragm (8) and anode (4) increases in 1.5-3 times from loading to unloading zone. The increase of the gap is necessary for providing uniform pressing of reaction mixture to anode cross the whole reaction zone (graphite particles volume increases in the course of treatment due to the increase of the interlayer gaps of graphite structure). Thanks to such a design of a reactor it is possible to conduct a continuous process of electrochemical oxidation of graphite at a constant anode potential and to produce uniform product. The constancy of potential is maintained by automatic tuning of the applied voltage.

Device for use in the production of oxidised graphite is also equipped with a mixer (11) with pipes (11) and (12) for loading reagents, with injector (14) for gaseous oxidants, with pipe (15) for exhaust gases and with pipes (16) and (17) for draining off the reaction mixture, one of which (17) is connected to the loading pipe (2) of the reactor through feeder (18). Any known appropriate devices can serve as vessels for hydrolysis of GIC, washing of oxidised graphite and means for filtration and drying. Such equipment (not shown in the Figures) can be consecutively connected with pipe (3) for unloading the reactor or with pipe (16) of mixer (11) for chemical treatment.

Modes for carrying out the invention.

Example 1.

15 kg of natural graphite (main fraction particle size more than 250 μm , ash residue lower than 0.1 % by weight) have been loaded into the cylindrical mixer (11), equipped with a mixing shaft (not shown), through pipe (12) with the help of booster. Then the mixer has been switched on with a speed 30 r/min and 32 l of saturated H_2SO_4 ($d=1.83 \text{ g/cm}^3$)

has been uniformly inserted for 20 min through pipe (13) using the booster. After that, not stopping mixing, ozone-oxygen mixture (ozone concentration - 10 % by volume) has been fed through injector (14) at an consumption of 600 l/h. Weight ratio H_2SO_4 : graphite = 4; redox potential of the oxidising solution in sulphuric acid measured in potentiometric cell with mercury-sulphate comparison electrode has been 1.36 V. After 10 h reaction mixture containing graphite hydrogensulphate in sulphuric acid solution has been unloaded through pipe (16). X-ray analysis has shown that the reaction product is the I stage graphite hydrogensulphate with identity period $l_c=7.97 \text{ \AA}$.

After that hydrolysis of graphite hydrogensulphate, washing with water and drying of the product have been done. 18.7 kg of graphite hydrogensulphate have been obtained. Then heat treatment has been carried out in a muffle furnace at 1000°C for 15 s. As a result expanded graphite with density 0.001 g/cm^3 has been obtained. Deviation of density is not more than 3%. Ash residue of expanded graphite < 0.1 % by weight. Expansion degree of oxidised graphite is $1000 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$.

Example 2.

Mixer (11) has been filled with 10 l of H_2SO_4 ($d=1.83 \text{ g/cm}^3$) and 15 l of fuming HNO_3 ($d=1.49 \text{ g/cm}^3$) and mixing has been done for 20 min. Then 10 kg of natural graphite has been added and its chemical treatment has been conducted while mixing at 60 r/min for 1.5 h. Weight ratio HNO_3 : $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4=1.25$ calculated for waterless acids. Weight ratio H_2SO_4 : graphite = 1.8; redox potential of the oxidising has been 1.03 V. Further reaction mixture has been let into the a vessel with cold water ($t < 20^\circ\text{C}$) and has been mixed for 30 min. After that solid phase has been filtrated from liquid. X-ray analysis has shown that the product is the I stage GIC ($l_c=7.93 \text{ ?}$). Then the residue has been washed with hot water ($50\text{-}60^\circ\text{C}$) until washing water $\text{pH}=2.0$. Obtained oxidised graphite has been dried at 90°C and has been analysed. Residue sulphur concentration has been 2.0 % by weight. After heat treatment of oxidised graphite at open air in muffle furnace at 1000°C for 10 s expanded graphite has been obtained with density 0.003 g/cm^3 . Sulphur concentration in expanded graphite is 0.1 % by weight. Expansion degree of oxidised graphite is $330 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$.

Example 3.

Mixer (11) has been filled with 15 kg of natural graphite, 10 l of sulphuric acid ($d=1.84 \text{ g/cm}^3$) and 23 l of fuming sulphuric acid containing 10 % by weight of free SO_3 . Simultaneously with filling the mixing has been switched on at 30 r/min and the oxidising treatment of graphite has been carried out at redox potential 0.6 V. Weight ratio H_2SO_4 : graphite = 1.2. After 1 h reaction mixture containing II stage GIC ($l_c=11.35 \text{ ?}$) has been unloaded. Consecutively hydrolysis, washing and drying have been conducted. As a result 16.4 kg of oxidised graphite has been obtained. By further treatment expanded graphite with density 0.005 g/cm^3 has been produced. Density deviation is not more than 3%. Ash residue of expanded graphite < 0.1 % by weight. Expansion degree of oxidised graphite $200 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$.

Example 4.

In order to set a particular level of the oxidising solution in reactor 12 l of H_2SO_4 ($d=1.83 \text{ g/cm}^3$) has been filled through pipe (2) into the lower part of reactor (1). After that the rotation of the axial shaft (5) with attached cathode (7), diaphragm (8) and radial vane (6) has been switched on. Rotation speed was 1 round in 3 h. Further the mixture of graphite and saturated sulphuric acid ($d=1.83 \text{ g/cm}^3$), preliminary mixed for 30 min in mixer (11), has been loaded through pipe (2). The loading of the reaction mixture has been conducted continuously with consumption 3 kg/h. Weight ratio H_2SO_4 : graphite = 2. Cathode and anode half-ring has been switched to voltage and electrochemical treatment of graphite has been carried out at anode potential 1.5 V measured with mercury-sulphate comparison electrode (10). Graphite has been transported from the loading zone by vanes (6) along the anode half-ring (4) and has been pressed by diaphragm (8). Between diaphragm (8), anode half-ring (4) and two neighbouring vanes (6) a reaction zone (9) has been formed which in process of moving has immersed in sulphuric acid solution which filled the lower part of cylindrical housing (1). Further graphite has been transported by vanes (6) from loading pipe (2) to unloading pipe (3). Since the gap between diaphragm and anode half-ring (4) steadily increased, vane (6) has pushed forward practically to a stop to a surface of anode half-ring (4). Radial movement of vanes (6) has been regulated by directing surface of upper part (19) of cylindrical reactor housing (1). In the unloading zone vanes (6) have been drowned and graphite hydrogensulphate has been purged from diaphragm (8) surface. After 1.5 h at unloading pie (3) a continuous unloading of a product in a form of a thick pulp of graphite hydrogensulphate in sulphuric acid solution has been performed. During electrochemical treatment the constant temperature ($25\text{-}30^\circ\text{C}$) in reaction zone has been maintained by cooling the outer surface of anode half-ring by circulating cold water in water-jacket (20).

X-ray analysis has shown that II stage graphite hydrogensulphate has been obtained ($l_c=11.35 \text{ \AA}$). Absence of graphite that has not reacted or graphite hydrogensulphate of other stages confirms the uniformity of the product.

Further graphite hydrogensulphate has been hydrolysed washed and dried. After that oxidised graphite has been

thermotreated at 1000°C in a muffle furnace and expanded graphite has been obtained with density 0.002 g/cm³. Density deviation is not more than 3%. Ash residue of expanded graphite <0.1 % by weight. Expansion degree of oxidised graphite 500 cm³/g.

Results of electrochemical experiments are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Example No.	Weight ratio H ₂ SO ₄ : graphite	Acid	Angular speed of shaft rotation (h ⁻¹)	Anode potential (V)	Phase composition of the product	Expansion degree of oxidised graphite at 1000°C
4	2	H ₂ SO ₄	0.33	1.5	II stage GIC-H ₂ SO ₄	500
5	1	H ₂ SO ₄	1.0	1.0	III stage GIC-H ₂ SO ₄	250
6	3	H ₂ SO ₄	0.33	2.0	I stage GIC-H ₂ SO ₄	1000
7	3	HNO ₃	1.0	1.2	III stage GIC-HNO ₃	165
8	4	HNO ₃	1.0	1.4	II stage GIC-HNO ₃	330

Example 9.

22 l of H₂SO₄ (d=1.83 g/cm³) has been pour into the mixer (11) then 1.37 kg NH₄NO₃ has been added and mixed for 3 min. After that the redox potential of the solution has been measured to be 1.53 V. Further 10 kg of powder natural graphite has been added and mixed at room temperature for 2 h. After that the solid residue has been immediately separated from oxidising solution at the filter until the concentration of solution has been lower 1.5 kg per 1 kg of graphite. The product has been analysis by X-ray and weighed. As a result of the oxidising treatment I stage graphite hydrogen-sulphate (I_c=7.99Å) has been obtained. The weight of graphite hydrogensulphate with residual quantity of oxidising solution has been 35 kg. According to calculations one can obtain 20 kg of I stage graphite hydrogensulphate from 10 kg of starting graphite. The weight of oxidising solution, remaining in graphite hydrogensulphate is 15 kg or 1.5 kg per 1 kg of starting graphite. Further 150 l of cold water has been pour to graphite hydrogensulphate and hydrolysis has been conducted for 5 min. After that oxidised graphite has been filtrated, washed at filter with 300 l of hot water and dried at 90°C. 12.7 kg of oxidised graphite has been obtained with expansion degree 900 cm³/g.

Example 10.

Mixer (11) has been filled with 20 kg of natural graphite and 24 l of sulphuric acid (d=1.83 g/cm³). Gaseous chlorine has been loaded through injector (14) at consumption 150 l/h. Mixing has been switched on at 30 r/min simultaneously with the loading of reagents. Oxidising treatment of graphite has been carried out with weight ratio H₂SO₄ : graphite = 2.2 and redox potential 0.72 V. After 3 h the inlet of chlorine has been closed. For electrochemical treatment reaction mixture has been loaded through pipe (17) and feeder (18) into loading pipe (2) of reactor. Loading has been performed with consumption of 6 kg of graphite per 1 h X-ray analysis of the product obtained in the mixer confirmed the formation of II stage graphite hydrogensulphate. Anodic oxidation of II stage graphite hydrogensulphate has been performed at potential 1.7 V with shaft rotation speed 2 r/h. After 0.5 h the product has been unloaded. According to X-ray analysis electrochemical treatment of II stage graphite hydrogensulphate has led to formation of I stage graphite hydrogensulphate (I_c=7.98 Å). After further treatment (hydrolysis, washing, drying) oxidised graphite has been obtained. Expanded graphite with density 0.0018 g/cm³ has been produced alter heat treatment at 1000°C. Density deviation is not more than 3%. Ash residue of expanded graphite <0.1 % by weight. Expansion degree of oxidised graphite is 600 cm³/g.

Example 11.

Mixer (11) has been filled with 20 kg of graphite, 11 l of H_2SO_4 ($d=1.83 \text{ g/cm}^3$) and 22 l of fuming sulphuric acid with free SO_3 concentration 15 % by weight. Mixing has been switched on at 30 r/min simultaneously with the loading of reagents. Oxidising treatment of graphite has been conducted with weight ratio H_2SO_4 : graphite = 1 and redox potential 0.65 V. After 1 h reaction mixture containing according to X-ray analysis II stage graphite hydrogensulphate ($l_c=11.40 \text{ \AA}$) has been unloaded. Unloading has been carried out through pipe (17) and feeder (18) into loading pipe (2) for performing of electrochemical treatment. Loading has been performed with consumption of 6 kg of graphite per 1 h. Electrochemical oxidation of II stage GIC has been carried out at anode potential 1.9 V and shaft rotation speed 2 r/h. After 0.5 h the product containing I stage graphite hydrogensulphate has been unloaded. Oxidised graphite with expansion degree $1000 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$ has been obtained by further treatment.

Example 12.

Cylindrical mixer (11) equipped with stirrer (not shown) has been filled with 15 kg of natural graphite (main fraction particle size more than 250 μm , ash residue lower than 0.1 % by weight) through pipe 12 using graphite booster. The mixer has been switched on at speed 30 r/min and 40 l HNO_3 ($d=1.52 \text{ g/cm}^3$) has been steadily loaded for 20 min through pipe (13) using booster. Mixing has been performed for 30 min. Weight ratio HNO_3 : graphite = 4 and redox potential of oxidising solution — 0.95 V. X-ray analysis confirmed formation of I stage graphite nitrate with $l_c=11.24 \text{ \AA}$. After that hydrolysis with cold water (18°C), washing with hot water (40°C) and drying of oxidised graphite at temperature not higher than 800°C have been conducted. Further expanded graphite with density 0.006 g/cm^3 has been obtained by heat treatment at 1000°C . Expansion degree of oxidised graphite is $154 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$.

Industrial Applicability.

The invention can be used for the production of expanded graphite in various fields of engineering.

Synthesis of GIC with consecutive hydrolysis is the first step of obtaining expanded graphite. Material on base of expanded graphite is used in mechanical engineering, chemical, atomic, aerospace industry, heat production and other fields of industry as shield coverings, packings, thickeners working at increased temperature and stable against chemical reagents, crucibles, underlays for melted non-ferrous metals, flexible carbon conductors, heatproof and fireproof composite materials, adsorbents etc.

Proposed invention provides production of oxidised graphite with uniform composition and high specific productivity of the process. Regulation of potential value at which oxidation is carried out allows to obtain strictly determined GIC stage and specified value of graphite expansion degree. Advantage of the process and device is the possibility of obtaining oxidised graphite with high expansion degree up to $1000 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$. Moreover the use of the proposed oxidation method does not lead to the increase of ash residue of graphite.

Claims

1. A process of production of oxidised graphite comprising the treatment of graphite powder in electrolytic solution of strong acids until formation of graphite intercalation compound, hydrolysis, washing and drying, wherein the treatment is conducted in the presence of chemical oxidants at a constant redox potential 0.55-1.55 V and/or the treatment is performed by anodic oxidation while conducting electric current through the mixture of graphite and acid located between anode and cathode at a constant anode potential 1-2 V and in weight ratio of acid consumption to graphite equal to 1-4.
2. A process according to Claim 1, wherein said acid is sulphuric or nitric acid.
3. A process according to Claims 1-2, wherein the treatment is conducted in the sulphuric acid solution at a constant redox potential 1.3-1.4 V while letting ozone-oxygen mixture in said solution.
4. A process according to Claims 1-2, wherein the treatment is conducted in the sulphuric acid solution at a constant redox potential 0.65-0.75 V while letting gaseous chlorine in said solution.
5. A process according to Claims 1-2, wherein the treatment is conducted in the sulphuric acid solution at a constant redox potential 0.55-0.65 V while letting sulphur (VI) oxide in said solution.
6. A process according to Claims 1-2, wherein the treatment is conducted in the sulphuric acid solution at a constant

redox potential 0.94-1.09 V while letting fuming nitric acid in said solution at weight ratio of nitric acid to sulphuric acid 1-2 as calculated for waterless acids.

7. A process according to Claims 1-2, wherein the treatment is conducted in the sulphuric acid solution at a constant redox potential 1.45-1.55 V while letting ammonium nitrate at consumption of 0.046-0.137 g per 1 g of starting graphite in said solution and while separating graphite intercalation compound said oxidising solution is removed to its content less than 1.5 g per 1 g of graphite.
8. A process according to Claims 1-2, wherein the treatment is conducted in the fuming nitric acid at a constant redox potential 0.92-0.97 V and drying is conducted at temperature not higher than 80°C.
9. A process according to Claims 1-2, wherein anodic oxidation of graphite in saturated sulphuric acid solution is conducted at anode potential 1.6-2.0 V, 1.3-1.5 V and 1.0-1.2 V for the formation of I, II and III stage graphite intercalation compound correspondingly.
10. A process according to Claims 1-2, wherein for the formation of I stage graphite intercalation compound the treatment of powder graphite is conducted consecutively in sulphuric acid solution with redox potential 0.65-0.75 V while letting gaseous chlorine in said solution or in sulphuric acid solution with redox potential 0.55-0.65 V while letting sulphur (VI) oxide in said solution with following anodic oxidation of the reaction mixture at a constant anode potential 1.6-2.0 V.
11. A process according to Claims 1-2, wherein anodic oxidation of graphite in sulphuric acid solution is conducted at anode potential 1.3-1.4 V and 1.15-1.2 V for the formation of II and III stage graphite intercalation compound correspondingly.
12. A device for use in obtaining oxidised graphite comprising reactor with a housing (1) having cylindrical inner surface, with pipes (2) and (3) for loading reagents and unloading formed graphite intercalation compound, with anode (4) and cathode (7) inserted in the housing and diaphragm (8) for pressing graphite to anode (4), located between cathode (7) and anode (4), wherein radially fixed on the axial horizontal shaft (5) vanes (6) with an opportunity of rotation and radial moving against the stop to a surface of the anode (4) are established in the reactor housing (1), diaphragm (8) is made in form of a ring with cuts for vanes (6) which form isolated zones (9) for electrochemical treatment, cathode (7) is made in the form of a wheel fixed on the axial shaft with cuts for vanes, anode (4) is made in the form of a half-ring and is established in the lower part of the housing (1) between loading and unloading pipes, axis of the anode half-ring is shifted against the axis of the horizontal shaft (5) to the loading pipe thus increasing the gap between the anode and diaphragm in 1.5-3 times from loading pipe to unloading pipe.
13. A device according to Claim 12, wherein said device is equipped with a mixer (11) with pipe (12) and (13) for loading reagents, and injector (14) for loading gaseous oxidants, and pipe (15) for removing exhaust gases, and pipes (16) and (17) for removing the reaction mixture, one of which is connected to reactor loading pipe through a feeder (18).
14. A device according to Claims 12-13, wherein said device is equipped with vessel for hydrolysis of graphite intercalation compound and for washing oxidised graphite, and with means of filtration and drying.

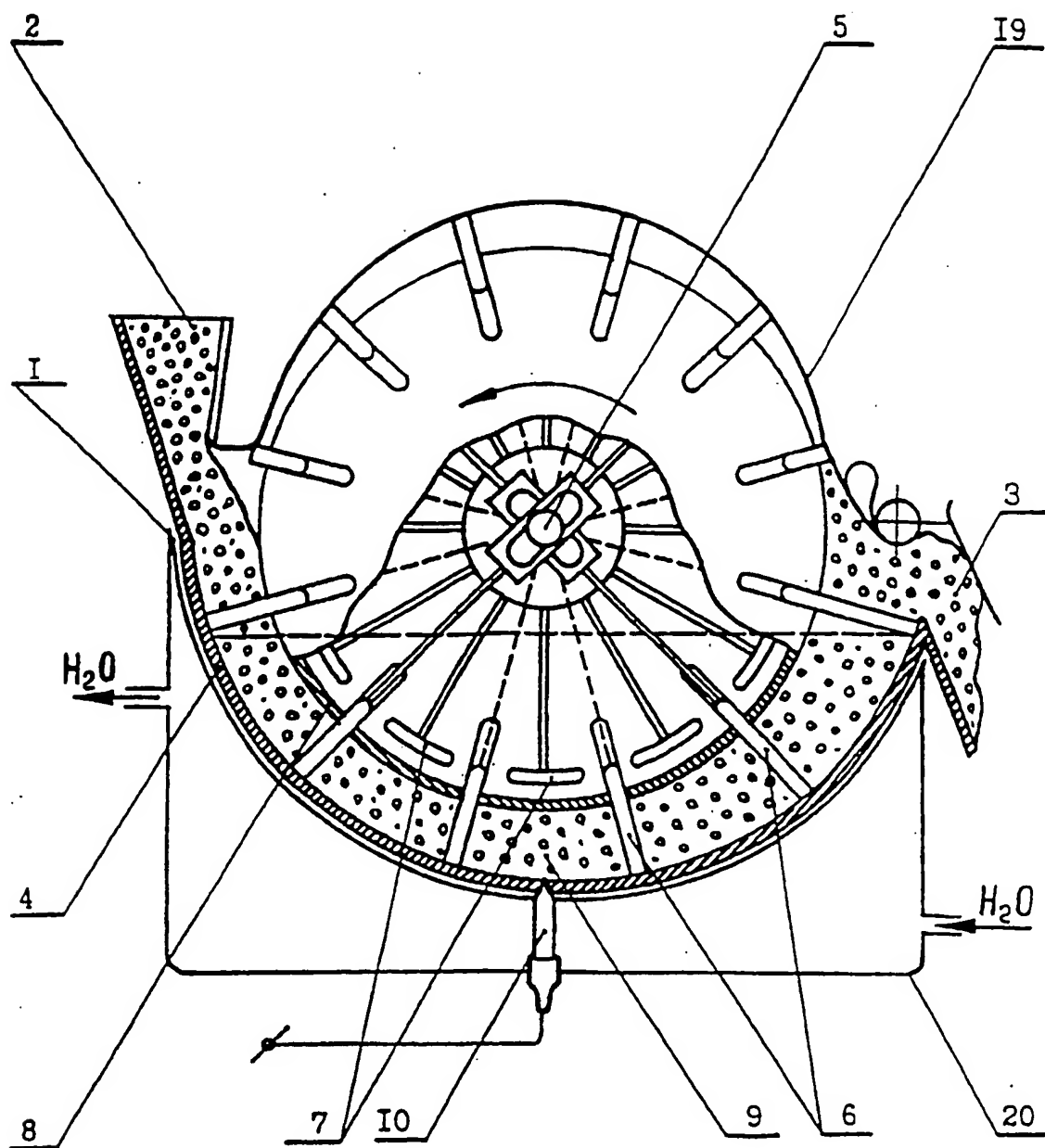


Fig. 1

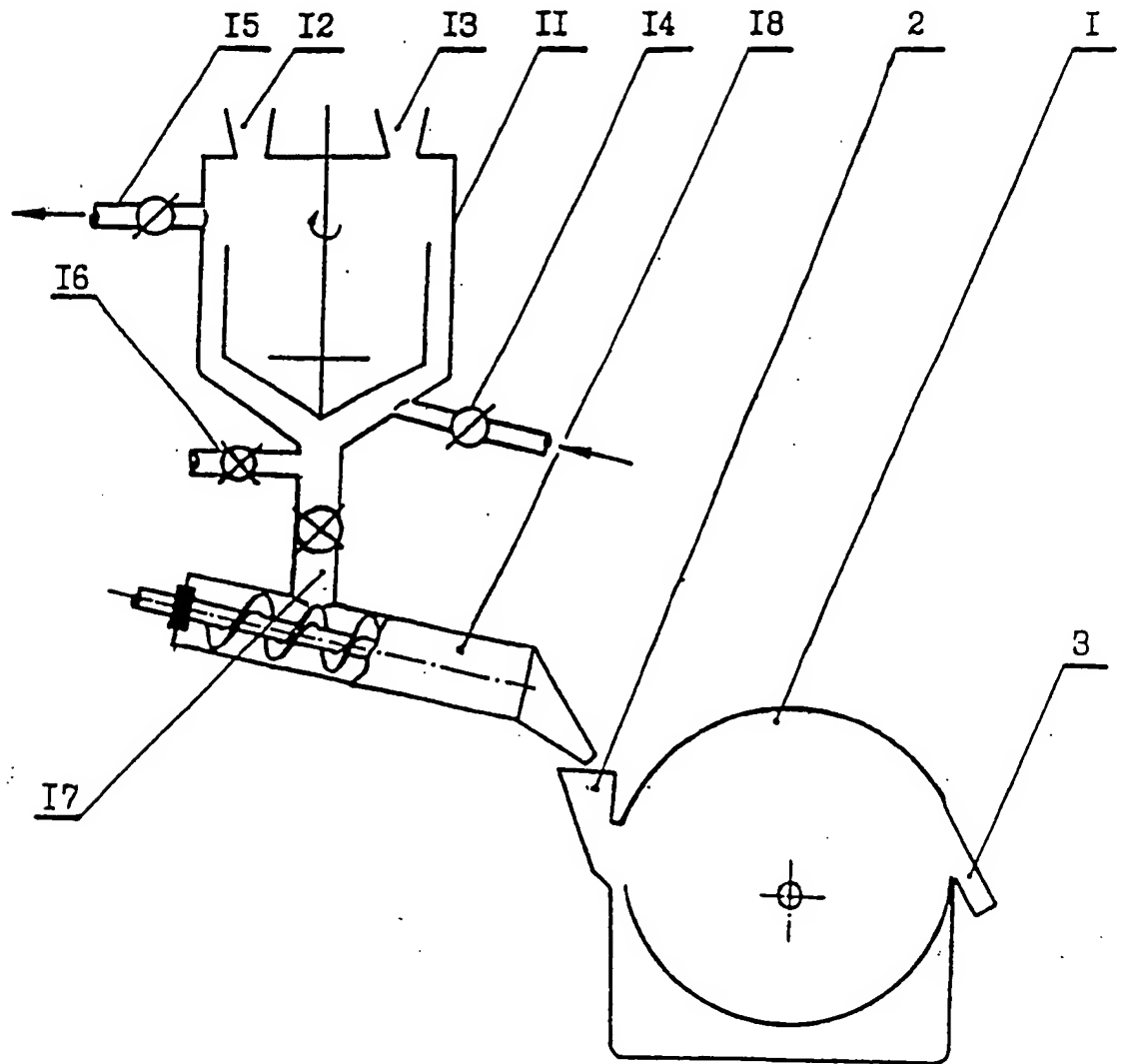


Fig. 2

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/RU 96/00106

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER IPC ⁶ C01B 31/04 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC		
B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) IPC ⁶ C01B 31/00, 31/02, 31/04, C01B 17/96, 17/98, C04B 35/52, 35/536, C25B 1/00 Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	SU, A1, 1497952 (MGU im. M.V. LOMONOSOVA), 30 January 1994 (30.01.94)	1-3,9-10
A	SU, A1, 1594865 (MGU im. M.V. LOMONOSOVA), 30 January 1994 (30.01.94)	1-2,4,9-10
A	WO, A1, 90/15022 (INSTITUT KHIMII DALNEVOSTOCHNOGO OTDELENII AKADEMII NAUK SSSR i dr.), 13 December 1990 (13.12.90)	1-2,6,8-11
A	US, A, 5057297 (KOA OIL COMPANY, LIMITED), 15 October 1991 (15.10.91)	1-2,6-8
A	GB, A, 1186727 (DOW CHEMICAL COMPANY), 02 April 1970 (02.04.70)	1-2,9-11
A,	SU, A1, 1577244 (INSTITUT FIZIKO-ORGANICHESKOJ KHIMII I UGLEKHIMII AN SSSR idr.) 20 March 1995 (20.03.95)	1-2,7,9-10,12
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.		
* Special categories of cited documents: "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance "E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reasons (as specified) "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed "T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention "X" document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone "Y" document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art "&" document member of the same patent family		
Date of the actual completion of the international search 05 August 1996 (05.08.96)		Date of mailing of the international search report 14 August 1996 (14.08.96)
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ RU Facsimile No.		Authorized officer Telephone No.

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/RU 96/00106

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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A	SU, A1, 1480304 (MGU im. M.V. LOMONOSOVA) 30 January 1994 (30.01.94)	1-2,9-10,12-14
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A	SU, A1, 1630213 (MGU im. M.V. LOMONOSOVA), 30 January 1994 (30.01.94)	1,12-14

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